

Museum Around the Corner

The Georgetown County Historical Society Museum

Transportation in Georgetown County ©

Recently, a paper came to light that we think was prepared by Pat Doyle, Georgetown's Master Historian. Her subject was travel and transportation in Georgetown County. Here are excerpts from that work.

"Obviously, the first avenues of transportation in our County were our many rivers. The earliest explorers and settlers reached America by ship and that continued to be the major means of travel and transportation well into the nineteenth century—and here in Georgetown into the twentieth century.

After the settlement of Charleston in 1670, the settlers moved up the nearby rivers to find land and homes, always in contact by means of small boats. By 1706, there were enough settlers along the Santee for it to be organized into a Parish and thus have some delineation and some measure of government. These early people moved very rapidly in securing land on the rivers. John Perry and his brother and sister obtained six grants on September 15, 1705 for 3,300 acres – the land on which Georgetown now stands.

We know that there were families living on the Black River as the birth of Peter Lane was recorded November 5, 1713. By 1729, grants for land as far north on the Waccamaw as present day Wachesaw Plantation had been made.

Georgetown was founded in 1729, and made a port of entry in 1732, indicating enough commerce and trade by water for the British government to pay officials to manage the port. Through the river system of the county, the area flourished in crops of indigo, rice and cotton shipped from inland and in the twentieth century, lumber.

While rivers were certainly the major means of transporting goods and people, the early settlers did not neglect land transport. The first overland roads followed the trails worn by the Indians of the area who traversed the land for eons. The King's Highway on the Waccamaw Neck followed it, and Highway 17 basically follows it to this day. We can pick it up across Winyah Bay and follow it to the Santee. Present day Highway 17 was built slightly to the east of the Old King's Highway.

Travelers crossed the King's Highway by ferry rowed by manpower and used sail when possible. At one time, this point of land was called Calais and across was Dover – although likening Winyah Bay to the English Channel is a little presumptuous!

The earliest ferry in Georgetown county was on the Black River. April 17, 1725, the Assembly vested the rights over the river in Alexander Montgomery. The ferry rights were a franchise that enabled the vestee to make money for his service. Often that person also ran an inn, or public house, where travelers could get meals and spend the night. Having ferry rights was a means of making a living. In return, the ferryman had to guarantee having a boat and oarsman ready at all times – day or night.

In 1731, three additional ferries were established in the Parish of Prince George, Winyah. One across Winyah Bay was vested in Samuel Masters, one across the Sampit from Elisha Screven's Plantation on

the north side to Robert Screven's on the south side. The ferry across the Santee was vested in Jonathan Skrine, where Lenud's Ferry is today. Lynch's Causeway was completed by 1741 and was the principle route for the coast.

In 1756, the Waccamaw ferry was moved higher up the river because the extent of water to be crossed at Fraser's point made it difficult to operate, especially in windy weather.

While they were navigating the rivers, these people were also interested in having roads. No matter how easy the water transportation was, they still wanted roads to connect them to Charleston, to the interior of the province, and to the other colonies. As early as 1721, the basic law establishing a system of roads was passed. By that act the governor appointed a group of commissioners of the high roads who were to serve for life. As the population increased, new boards were appointed to build roads and thus the interior was opened to the immigrant and traveler.

The commissioners had the power to tax those in their specific jurisdiction for the funds to build these roads. There was every effort to do the road work in the off times when the planting and harvesting were not being carried on.

In 1739 a post road was set from Charleston to the northern colonies via Georgetown and the Cape Fear River. The Assembly appropriated £200 which the Charleston merchants supplemented in order to provide this service. The establishment of the post roads over which the mail could be carried was a major step forward in improving transportation and communication. This was crucial in keeping in touch with the colonies as difficulties with the Mother country developed. Over time, these roads were improved and new roads added as the population grew. Stagecoach service to Charleston was announced in 1797. Leaving Georgetown at 5am, it arrived in Charleston at 9am the next morning.

The introduction of the steam engine, both for rail and ships was a major step forward in the mid nineteenth century. Ships continue to come into Georgetown to this day. Railroads made their appearance in 1886. Automobiles were late arriving to Georgetown. By the late 1920s there was a demand for better roads and for bridges to span the rivers. In 1926, the Yauhanna Bridge opened. The causeway over the Santee Delta opened in 1928, with the final link, the bridge over the Waccamaw – Black River opening in 1935, delayed by the Depression. “

With the need for speed, one can traverse continents in hours today, instead of the days it took just to go from Georgetown to Charleston. We can only imagine how the early settlers would take to all these new fangled contraptions we take for granted today. We mostly walk for pleasure and exercise now, while yesteryear walking was the only way to get from here to there.